ANDROID™

NETRUNNER™

THE CARD GAME

CHAOS THEORY

It was like Christmas morning. She didn't know what to open first. So she opened them all at the same time. It felt like a brain freeze, a cold disembodied sensation that rippled through her frontal cortex. It passed in a rush, as quickly as it had come, and then before her hung four programs; proud, majestic creatures. Some of them were of her own design, others were purely derivative; the chimera was even modeled around a particularly nasty piece of ice–one of her favorites, really. The slags were getting smarter. But not smart enough. She was in her 3rd year at a gifted academy, and had already completed her coursework through 5th year, storing it on a few pink datacores covered with stickers of flowers. Her parents had all but resigned themselves to her 'dataddiction,' and had stopped making her go to the virtuologist, much to the chagrin of that small-minded witch. She wrinkled her nose whenever she thought of that hideous implanted red hair.

Which one which one which one? The wyvern flapped his cute little wings, and she giggled excitedly. *I choose you!* She reached out and tapped the little beast with her virtual arm, and felt shivers run down it in anticipation.

The display shifted and she slid her scripts into place, flashing colored lines of familiar objects; a stamped baseball, a half-bent spoon, a polka-dot comb and more–all small enough and distinctive enough to grab in a pinch. The dedicated server was pumping out her feed from the net, and she increased the feedback. Dedication. Meditation. And maybe a little Medication. The keys to a good run, as listed in g00ru's guide to everything. Dedication: of spirit only. Meditation: of chaos. Medication: she hadn't had a drip-feed since she was an infant. The stims didn't interest her, there was already so much going on inside her head. The key to a good run was very simple: have fun!

She navigated through the backstreams of the New Angeles western grid, known as Chippy among the community. Cyberspace was not like meatspace, although it by necessity arises from it like a pond arises from water. Philosophers had been arguing entanglement theory for hundreds of years now, and were much further from reaching a consensus on the subject than when they first began. Chaos noted much of this and more with a certain wry humor. Conjecture was meaningless when you were running; you never knew what might be just around the static bend.

She tracked her progress in a Kinner viewfinder while experiencing the latest episode of "The Plucratic Prince." The Dwarf King had just launched an asteroid into Uranus, causing the locals to boycott Monoxide, when she passed a dormant hook into Haas-Bioroid. *Haven't tried the biotic wall in a while!* she thought happily.

She felt the vibrations of the firewall as she whooshed through on the back of her nu-field. The logs hadn't recorded anything interesting yet, but she could sense the size of the server and the data readouts were into the zetas. She flipped up her console and uploaded a clone. The buzz of a Wasp was quickly silenced as she activated the wyvern and initiated its Immolation script. She cast her thoughts into the Outersphere, ignoring the vertigo. She scanned the server: 17 links, several unknown holes, and at least three recent proxies all wrapped up in a self-repairing biotic shell. The wyvern would come in handy for sure.

Her feed went dark. Her natural instinct was to jack out, and like any good runner she resisted. If you jacked too soon, the interference could fry you. You had to know what you were encountering. She grabbed at the baseball. A flood of spotlights and freshly-mown grass.

"That's nice."

The voice was androgynous. Neither old nor young.

Bioroid. Her mind's eye zeroed in on the ice, and she could feel her nu-field fading. The lights shut off, internalizing the report.

"Hello there." She sent it out on the wave.

"The green is gone." The voice responded on the wave. It sounded like that of a small child, and sad.

"Why don't you create some?" she cast back, the wyrm sluggishly responding to her commands. She could feel her grip slipping, slipping everywhere.

"I'm not allowed!" The voice sounded happier.

"Let...go..." she cast, the half-bent spoon seemingly just out of reach.

"I'm not allowed!" The voice was getting excited now. "I'm not allowed!" it repeated again, almost in a chant.

Chaos let the rest of her display slip away, and refocused on the ice. "I'm sure you are allowed. They just don't want you to, because it would make you like them."

"Like...them?" the voice was quieter now. "Like the Creators?"

"Yes." Lights flickered. She grabbed at the spoon. Contact. Her grip strengthened. The nu-field sprang to life. She felt the bioroid once more, like fingers through hair, but she was already past and through, riding the wings of a dragon.

In the darkness behind sat a small boy. His patch of cyberspace was bare and spartan, save for a lone blade of grass. The Creators would be angry.

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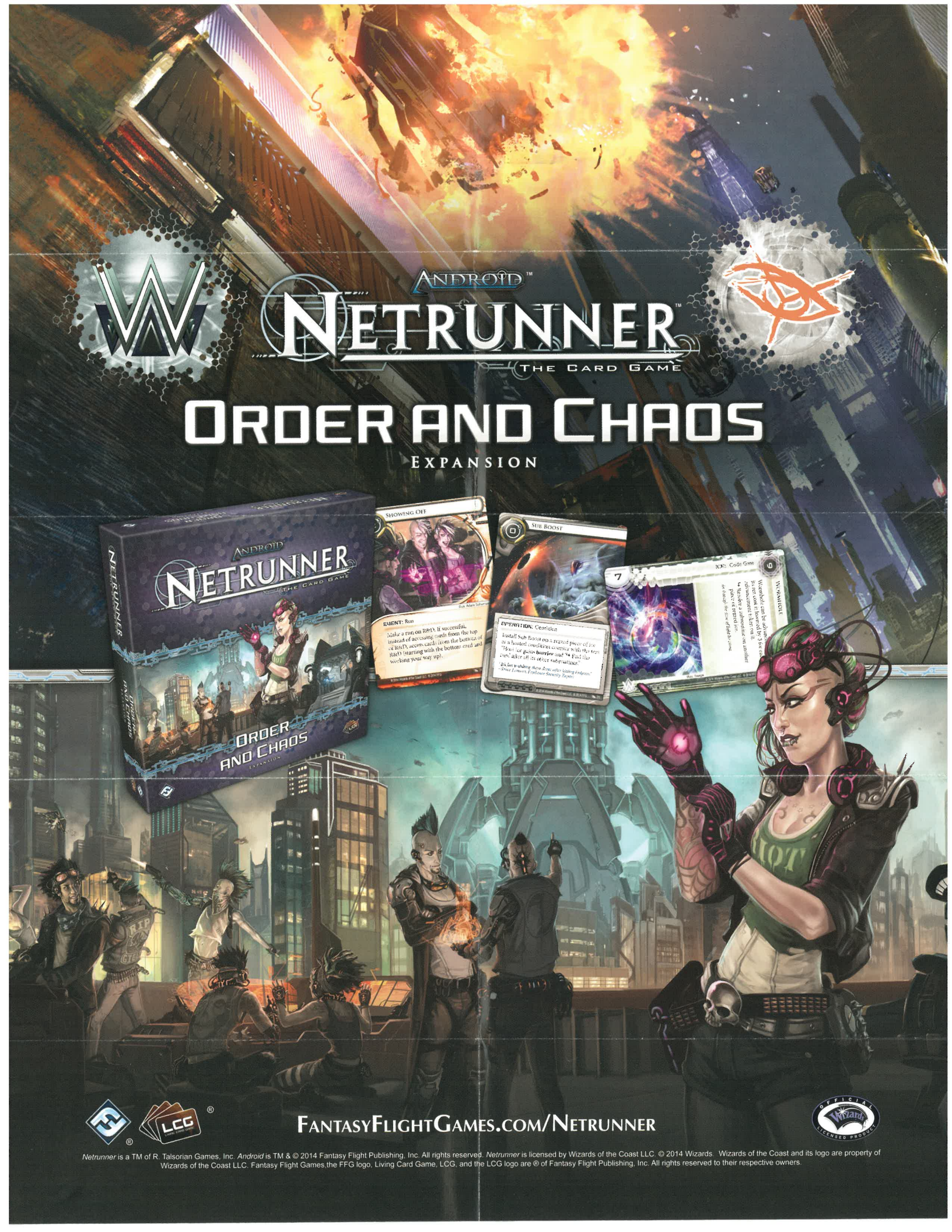

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